RAGNA HELSHER RATH

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Ragna Helsher Rath

(1879 -)

Ragna Helsher was a teacher when she met James Arthur Rath at a Bible class for professional women in Massachusetts. He was one of the Bible class instructors from Springfield YMCA College.

After they were married, the Hawaiian Board of Missions asked them to come to Hawaii to assume the responsibilities of the Palama Mission. They accepted the assignment and arrived at Honolulu on March 1, 1905.

Soon they began to expand services to people in the area, including recreational, medical and dental facilities. Mr. Rath raised most of the funds for these additions to the church and kindergarten activities and in 1910 the Palama Mission became Palama Settlement.

This is Mrs. Rath's story about the development of Palama Settlement from 1905 until Mr. Rath's death in 1929.

Lynda Mair, Interviewer

INTERVIEW WITH RAGNA HELSHER RATH

(MRS. ARTHUR RATH)

At her Arcadia apartment, 1434 Punahou Street, 96822

August 6, 1971

R: Ragna H. Rath

M: Lynda Mair, Interviewer

R: I was teaching school. I was teaching in Massachusetts in a town--Chickapee, Massachusetts--and there was a Bible class for professional women, teachers, business women, you see, and they had for instructors two men from Springfield YMCA College and one of the men was James [Arthur] Rath. He had our class and we met every Sunday and discussed problems of the Bible because at that time everybody was busy with the "higher criticism". I don't know if you've ever heard of that. They were beginning at that time to find out the truths and values of the stories of the Bible; how much were true and so on. The course was very interesting and we became, well, acquainted, of course. He invited the class up to Springfield and so on and that's how we met.

He had come from India and he was a sergeant in the army there but he contracted malaria and had to be physically discharged. But he was interested in doing things, especially with the young people somehow, and he was assisting in the Bombay YMCA. While there, a Mr. D. (whose name she couldn't recall) was sent from the YMCA central office in New York to India to find a young man who could be brought back to Springfield College to study YMCA work, then go back to India to help the young people. That was the custom at the time. They'd send a man to the different foreign countries because they felt they would come back, be able to talk the language and understand the people.

Mr. Rath was graduated from YMCA College in Springfield. It was to be in June and in May he heard that the YMCA had decided not to carry on that policy because a prophet is without honor save in his own country (Lynda chuckles) and they felt the young men hadn't been as successful as they'd hoped they'd be. So here he was, had been three years there studying to go back. So, when he

graduated in June, he went to a farm school for boys in the harbor of Boston and he was there during the summer. But it wasn't what he wanted. He wasn't in tune with the activities there, so he had a chance to work in the electric company, such as the Hawaiian Electric Company here, and he was going to make the decision whether he would keep on with social work or religious such as he had or whether to be [in] just sheer business. And then his decision was kind of made for him.

We were married and living in Lynn and he received a letter from the president of the YMCA College in Springfield to meet a certain Dr. [Doremus] Scudder in Boston. Dr. Scudder had been sent from Honolulu by the Hawaiian Board of Missions, it was called then, to get a young man or a couple to come back and work in this Palama district.

There was a Mr. Peter C. Jones who lived here. I don't remember just which company he was in here in Honolulu. [He was the president of C. Brewer and Company.] They lived up Nuuanu Street anyway and he, in the afternoon, would take his wife and drive around for--oh, to get away from things--and they liked to go down in the west part of town in Palama because there were mostly Hawaiians living there and he was very fond of Hawaiians. And while there he noticed that there was no kind of recreation--no religious work or recreation of any kind--and he decided that he would see what he could do about it so he bought a piece of land, then he had this building put up. It was called a chapel--Palama Chapel--for any of the people, children, in that district who wanted to come. And they were glad because there was no church of any kind up there. He had the ones who first were the leaders, people who were the sons of--for instance, there was Mr. Erdman, Henry Judd, and John Erdman, who were thinking of going into the ministry. They thought, well now, here's a good chance for them to come, these young men, and see if they <u>will</u> be interested in that work. So they came and they went around and the people were very glad to have them. They had good attendance and they met every Sunday.

There was another man who came who was not really a minister, named Lewis--Mr. Lewis. He worked there and the people were very receptive to him. And while there, he told the committee that what they should have was a man and his wife because he felt the women needed something a little bit different. So Dr. Scudder was sent to the mainland to see if he could meet somebody and he'd gone to the different schools. Then he went to the YMCA College in Springfield where Mr. Rath had been. He asked them if they would recommend somebody and they suggested that he come and visit Arthur--Mr. Rath--and me. We were living in Lynn. So he told us about Honolulu and the situation as best he could and we understood it as best we could.

(chuckles) And he said, "Now you think it over and let me know in two weeks."

Well, we did think it over and we didn't talk about it at all. When the two weeks were finished, we said, "Well now, what are we going to do?" We decided to come over here. I was a teacher and he had had the training in college to meet people and so on and so that's how we came over. We came March 1, 1905.

M: Wow! (laughter)

R: Mr. Jones had a home for us--had found a place for us in Palama--but we stayed at their home for two weeks so everything could be all ready, furnished and so on. And also, and beside, they wanted to look us over too. (laughter) Naturally. So that's how we came. That's the beginning. The building in Palama was called a chapel but when we came they decided to call it a Mission because we expanded. There was the church, with evening services twice a week, and a Sunday School and a kindergarten.

I used to visit in the district. Do you know Honolulu at all?

M: Yeh, I live here.

R: Well, you know where River Street is and then on up to School Street and up to Houghtailing Road--that's in Kalihi--and then we had Iwilei. I used to go around in all those districts and visit the people. I tried to visit them once a month. Well, I being a haole and they being Hawaiians, in order to do the right thing, why they had the pianist, Lucy Vierra, go with me and she would go to the door and say, "Aloha. Mrs. Rath from Palama Chapel, now Palama Mission," and then of course they'd look me over. Then we'd have a pleasant talk--that was our introduction.

Then Mr. Jones had a kind of reception one evening at our house to have the people come in and meet us, you see. We had ice cream and the youngsters got hold of the ice cream. (laughter) And we had a chance to meet them <u>there</u>, so everything was made very pleasant and matter-of-fact. They attended the chapel and enjoyed it and after awhile we had mothers' meetings and I'd have people from Central Union [Church]. Mr. P. C. Jones was a member of Central Union. He was--uh let me see. The Hawaiian Board of Missions asked us over but Central Union Church had something to do with it too. Let me just think.

M: Did they support it some way?

R: Yes, they helped support it and then afterwards, years

later when they had the Aloha Fund, you know--what they call an aloha count--Mr. Rath raised the money. But let me look at my notes. I don't want to get too far ahead. (pause)

Oh yes, the man who was here (in Palama) when we left was the Reverend Arthur C. Logan. But what had happened before that, you see, in 1900 there had been a great fire in Chinatown and many of the people had lived there and come up to Kaumakapili Church, which is now down in Palama but was on Beretania Street. Well, this fire started there and the church was burned and the people all moved out. Some moved down in Palama and some went to Kalihi. That's why there were so many people in that Palama district. And when Kaumakapili Church burned, there was no church at all for them to go to. (several minutes of incoherent thinking-out-loud is edited out)

Mr. P. C. Jones, being a member of Central Union Church, wanted this chapel to be a branch of his church so that the young people, when old enough to be affiliated with a church, would become members of it. He asked members of Kaumakapili and Kawaiahao churches, so it was then the chapel was dedicated on June 1st. But it was the Hawaiian Board of Missions that brought us over and in 1910 Arthur raised a lot of the money to carry on the work and pretty soon he realized that he was raising more of the money than either the church or the [board]. So in 1910 he asked--suggested that it be freed from both the Hawaiian board and the church and instead of being called an Hawaiian mission, be called Hawaiian Settlement. Well of course that caused an uproar among certain of the ones who were in charge; they didn't like it. But it [his suggestion] was [accepted] and after 1910 we began raising the money for it.

As our staff visited in the neighborhood, we realized how much the people needed medical care. I know it hit us very strongly. I was calling on one of my girls, as I called them. She had this high fever and I said, "Have you had the doctor?" They said, "Yes, but the doctor says we must boil the water. But she doesn't like it hot." So you see how ignorant they <u>were</u>. So I tried to explain. Mr. Rath decided if we possibly could we'd have a nurse in the district. So we did and she lived with us. Mr. Jones gave us a horse and buggy so the nurse could use that. That's how we started with our nursing.

The kindergarten went on and we lived on Desha Lane. We moved there about the middle of March in 1905. And then, of course, for the boys we had different sports; and for the girls we had sports and we also had sewing and we had choir; and then they attended Sunday School in the morning and the service at night. Once during the week Mr. P. C. Jones was very regular in coming to the services.

We started in the little chapel and then, in order to have the facilities, he raised the money for a gymnasium. Then a Mr. Hartwell down at Waikiki--Mr. Rath and he were great friends, I don't know how except that Arthur had met him--he told Arthur, "Well, Rath, you ought to have a swimming pool for those people." So we had a swimming pool and over it was the gymnasium. That was used tremendously.

Then we moved on. We had been in one little cottage, then the woman who rented it moved away from her large house and we lived there. Then in 1911 we had a trip to the mainland for a vacation and when we came back then, Mr. Rath had a house built right in back of the chapel. We lived in the second floor and the third floor; and downstairs in the basement we had our dispensary and we also started a dental clinic there, so that place was very well filled. At the side of the chapel, before the gymnasium was built, he was able to get another building of two floors where we had classes held for sewing and some small, simple games. We had a very small ground, just large enough for a swing, which was used tremendously. We could use the Kaiulani School playground after school hours there, until we branched out and got more land. And that's the beginning of it. (chuckles)

M: Very interesting. Let me ask you a couple of questions that I wasn't clear on as you went by. What denomination was the chapel?

R: Congregational.

M: Somewhere along the line you were talking about your husband being in the YMCA, that's why he came to the United States, but the settlement never had any connection with the YMCA?

R: No. No.

M: It was strictly the Hawaiian Board of Missions?

R: It was the church organization, yes. His purpose was to get these people down to Central Union. Now this is on the side [off the record]. Mustn't repeat it. We had one woman--her family is prominent here--she was so interested in the Sunday School. I was the superintendent as long as I could and so we, on Children's Sunday that was in June every year, to please Mr. Jones we would bring the Palama Chapel children. They'd walk from Central Union, which was then opposite from where the governor's mansion is now; and if you know where King and Liliha is, [you know] how long a walk they had, but they loved it. So they went to the church; had been going year after year. This woman

was attending one of the meetings of the board of the church and this man said, "All those children--what does that mean?" And I don't remember whether Mr. Jones was there or not but they said, "Mr. Jones built the chapel with the hope that the members would join Central Union Church." Oh, they raised their hands in horror. "All those children?" They weren't haoles, you know. And this woman was so angry, she stopped coming. No, she came to the Sunday School for a while, but she dropped out of Central Union Church. She went directly to the Episcopal church. She thought if that was the attitude they had, she didn't want to have anything to do with it.

But that was it, you know, why people didn't like to go down to Palama--pass through Palama on the streetcars--because these people were in the streetcars and they were afraid they'd catch some germs. Oh, that Palama was held in. . .way down. One man even said to me sometime after--I had five children all born there--and he said, "How can you be there with your children?" And I said, "Why they're all right; they keep well." We had a dog--this was when we were living down on King and Liliha--a nice, uh, I'll think of it--a very fine-type dog, and this doctor had come to visit some of the patients in the office and he said, "Whose dog is that?" And I said, "It's ours." "Do you let that dog live in this district?" Some of them even thought it wasn't good for the dog. (laughter)

But I must tell you, Mr. Rath was a great one for cleanliness. When we got there, in there (her unpublished book) it tells about the condition of things. There would be pools and I know up Palama Street he spoke of a place where there was some water--drainage--and there were dead rats in it. And I know I went up one street to visit some children and here was a mattress thrown out and the rats were running around. Well, any time I knew anything like that I told Mr. Rath and he went to the governor about it. The Board of Health. They couldn't do anything about it. Then he went to the governor--it was Governor [Lucius E.] Pinkham then [1913-18]--and he was so mad. He came up to the house one morning and he said, "Is Mr. Rath in?" And I said, "No." "Well," he said, "Tell him I'll be at my office." I didn't know what it was about but he'd (Arthur) said to a friend, "Now, I've been to the Board of Health and I've been to the governor and, really, it is not safe there, the sanitary conditions." And this man said, "Well, you'd better write to the paper." So he wrote; had an article in the paper. Well, the Hawaiian Board of Missions came and the governor came and some of the others about it because they were so indignant, but Arthur said, "Well, I'll show you." And he showed them some of the places, then he said, "Now I'll show you this street." "Oh, we've seen enough," they said, and they

went on. But it was cleaned up.

And I remember once he was out for a week's rest in the country and they thought that cholera had broken out. Somebody telephoned him and he came in immediately. Well, one or two places were closed. I know we closed our chapel. There were just a few, one or two cases, but it was enough to be on the alert. So he was very particular about health. That's why he was so anxious to have the nurses and doctors.

Several doctors in town devoted one afternoon free to come down to look at the children and any patients that came. They gave their services in the different types of medicine and at that time, too, we had a nurse in each school in the morning from Kalihi, Palama, Kauluwela, Kakaako, even down at Waikiki, to just check and see how the children were. That was in the morning. Then in the afternoon, they'd go in their districts if they knew of anybody being sick. And there was a corps of women from Central Union who would offer to bring mothers to the dispensary in the afternoon in case they were too far away to go. So he did everything to have sanitary--sanitation all around--and it did help the settlement and the district very much and the people had much confidence in him because they knew that he was really doing it for their good.

And then <u>he</u> had the clubs when we first came but, having to carry on all the work, he had different men--young men--come down to help with the sports. So the boys and girls all had a very happy time there, what with the swimming--they did well in that--and the baseball. Then in 1924 he began raising money for what is now the new Palama Settlement.

M: The new buildings and so forth?

R: Yes, the new buildings. (END OF SIDE 1/1ST TAPE)

M: One thing I wanted to ask you was: Your husband's education was not really in the line of medicine or any of these things? He just sort of learned as he went along?

R: No. No. He was so interested in them. Well, his father was an army surgeon in India, you see, so that's how he knew more or less about it.

M: Was your husband's family English then?

R: Oh yes, yes. They were born in England and they came to India. And he went to the schools there and was matriculated, as they called it over there--graduated--from high school and so on and he came over and was there three years in Springfield. Of course he knew English and could

speak it as well as anybody. I had some lovely letters from his mother.

It was very interesting, when he came to the college. Of course they looked with curiosity at this man who came from India and then one of them said, "Oh, isn't it a pity, he won't be able to understand or speak English." Arthur kind of smiled. But pretty soon they found out that his English was pretty good, (laughter) because in one of the tests in elocution he was on the top list. But that's the attitude we have anyway of everybody.

And of course, coming to Palama, I wanted to say this too--the people. We lived right in the section. There were Hawaiians on both sides and in front of us lived an Amoy--I mean . . . oh, I don't need to mention that name--anyway, a young woman whose father was a famous gambler--a Chinese gambler. On the other side was the Hawaiian minister and in back was--they call them supervisors now; we called him a councilman--a city councilman. Then there were Portuguese. There weren't Japanese there then but there were some, yes, a few Puerto Ricans. But there were mostly Hawaiians and Chinese.

I just thought of a kind of interesting story. One morning a man came, quite disturbed, and the neighbor in back of us was Chinese. This man had already got his ticket to go back to China, but through some. . . . I guess they had a discussion or something. One of the people there was mad and just shot him. Killed him.

M: This was the gambler.

R: No, that was on that side; this was on the side above. They had large rice fields on Kauai so they were well-off. And immediately they--well, the reason we knew it (about the shooting) was because they came down and asked if the nurse could go up and see if there was anything she could do. So the nurse made arrangements for him to go to the hospital and so on. But they moved away immediately. As long as something like that happened in the house, they couldn't stay in the house. So we had all those ideas to cope with and so on.

They thought the haoles had us live there to see if there were any lepers. Well it so happened that I didn't think so much about it at the time because I thought, oh, we won't get it anyway. Right back of the two houses was a large taro patch--that's mostly water with the plants growing--but they also had just a little ridge of a path so you could go through and I used to cut across there to visit this well-known Hawaiian family--Parker family. This day as I went by there. . . . There'd been an old shack a little distance into the taro patch. I don't know what it was used for, but I heard some sounds there that

didn't sound very good so it rather startled me and I told Mr. Rath about it. He had the police come up and see what it was. Some family wanted to get rid of their leper patient so they just left him there and that was it. They had no pity.

A long time ago there was a Graham Taylor that used to write for the Reader's Digest and he came to Honolulu to look into the leper situation to write an article and, of course, he was sent down to Palama about it. And he had heard the rumor and he found out it was true. If people didn't want to bother with their parents--and at that time, if the Hawaiian was old they didn't want to bother with him--they could arrange it so that the doctor would have him sent up to Molokai. They had heard that there were many people up there who did not have leprosy.

M: You're kidding! [expressing disbelief] What kind of a doctor would certify a thing like that?

R: Well, they wouldn't tell the truth, you know, and so on. It may not have been a real doctor but somebody who helped get people up there; just to get them on the boat to get up there (Molokai). And they found out that there were many [such cases]. However, I understood--this was years ago--that a few did come back. They brought them back because they were all right.

I knew a public school teacher who was a teacher at the Liliuokalani School that they're tearing down. She had been taking care of her mother and then her mother died and she found out that, uh--well, she didn't seem to be well. Her hands seemed to be getting shorter and she went to the doctor and she had leprosy, so she went up there. But she wrote books and they were a number of books for the schools, you see--different articles; I'll say articles, not books--but they were fumigated and so it was all right. Well, she was so cured that they allowed her to come back. She wouldn't let you touch her or get anywhere near her. She didn't live very long.

I remember when I was getting the girls ready to sing Christmas carols for Christmas and there was this girl who had such a lovely voice and she was with the girls. Oh, they were about fifteen and sixteen years old. Then I noticed after Christmas I didn't see her and pretty soon I asked one of the girls, "Where's"--I don't remember her name; I'll say "Mary?" "Oh, she's on Molokai. She found out that she had leprosy on her hand." So you see how quickly it would come at that time. So no wonder they felt that we were there [to locate lepers].

I know at one settlement on the Island of Maui--they don't have it now, but at that settlement there, they were sure the woman was sent up to see if there was leprosy,

but there was no truth in it. So, all those problems came up [in the course of their work.]

M: Did the Hawaiian Board of Missions just give you a free hand to more or less move into any area you thought there was a need for help?

R: Oh yes, yes. They were glad to be free of it all. So we were--oh, yes, I began to tell you--we came in 1905 and in 1910 Mr. Rath felt that we were doing much more than just mission work. And there was quite a meeting of different feelings, but at last there was--oh, he had many of the prominent men on his committee working for him, representative of the different people. Mr. P. C. Jones was one you know and some of the others. He always had successful men on his board. He called it the Palama Settlement Board and then they would meet with Central Union when Central Union had its meetings. And so these supported him in what he was doing. He always talked with them first about it so they understood what he was doing and helped a great deal when criticisms came along. So that's where we got our foundation and that's why it was always so successful, because we had those men with us; in back of us.

I don't remember, I have the names somewhere. Well, here are some of the names of people: Robinson, W. F. Allyn--the library [Edna Allyn Children's Room]; Mrs. C. M. Cooke--The Friend. Those were the Free Kindergarten and the Children's Aid Society. These are the committee for Palama Settlement: there was Mrs. J. O. Gilman--she was of the Atherton family; Mrs. P. C. Jones, J. P. Cooke, Mrs. Grace Cooke.

The average income for the year was $4,100 and that is. . . . The Reverend [Hiram] Bingham II was a great help. These are some people who gave the money: Jones, Lowrey, Waterhouse, Robinson, Cooke, and Castle. And then Richards and Mrs. [J. A.] Hopper. They lived. . . .

Tells about the different changes here, but over here. . . . (she is leafing through a book) Is there anything you want to know particularly? (long pause)

M: One thing I was puzzled about. When you first came here, did the Hawaiians speak English?

R: Yes. Oh yes.

M: You had no trouble.

R: No trouble at all. No. They all did.

M: When had they picked up their English?

R: Well, they must have with the fishermen--with the whaling. I mean, the ships that came in. And you see, Central Union was built long before 1905, when we came. And then Kawaiahao Church. They had the Hawaiian there but they also had them speak English. And then they had the schools. The public schools.

M: And they had to go to school.

R: Yes. So that's how they knew that. The Episcopal church was very helpful. One thing that surprised me very much, when I visited the Chinese families, the Chinese women could speak such good English. So I said to one of them once, "How is it that you speak such good English?" She said, "We learned it at the Saint Andrew's Episcopal Church." At Saint Andrew's Church they used to have the women there to meet and they studied.

M: You mentioned that Palama Settlement had a kindergarten?

R: Yes.

M: Was that for working mothers or something like that?

R: No, oh no, just a kindergarten school. We had one and they had them in different parts of the city too. We weren't the only ones that had it. I was talking--found out about Mrs. McKay. She was on the committee. Now I think it (the book) says something about the kindergarten here. [Helen Willis McKay co-authored A History of the Free Kindergarten and Children's Aid Association of the Hawaiian Islands, 1895-1945.]

M: Was that an all-day thing?

R: Oh no, just from 9:00 until 12:00, I think it was; not 9:00 until 2:00. I think it was 12:00 [noon]. And we had the teachers--the children from around. (consulting book) It says here too that when we came they had it but it wasn't used so much. They had a Boys' Brigade Building. That's where they were taught more or less of the military, you know, and besides the clubs.

Then they started a trade school but that wasn't very successful and when we came it was finished. But in order that the boys would have a place to play--the boys' clubs --it was for the Boy Scouts--the boys built the building themselves with the help of an instructor from the Kamehameha Schools. It was a very nice little building right next to the gymnasium and right in front of that was a brook. So they had so many things--that was done for them.

M: Well, did the people that worked at the settlement, aside from yourselves, come mostly from the haoles in the community?

R: No, they came from the mainland. Our first girls' director was a Miss Shipman who came from Vermont. Now the boys' directors, however, those who helped there except when we sent for older ones: there's a Ben Clarke. Well, he came later. I was trying to think who it was. I know one of our--that was later on too. But Mr. Rath carried on most of the work with the boys. He had had that training at the YMCA and, yes, there were some of the older boys who would come sometime to the gymnasium. They conducted the clubs. I remember one of our Japanese boys. He was uh--hadn't been there long, then he went to the mainland to Springfield and he came back and he worked there.

M: How did the haole community feel about participating in these things, since it was a Congregational-type activity and the Congregationalists were mostly haoles, weren't they?

R: No, the ones who attended the clubs and classes were all Hawaiians and Portuguese.

M: Yeh, but the leaders?

R: Well, I think that was because--now I may be vain, but they had confidence in Mr. Rath that the ones who came would be all right. However, they were frank enough to go to him when things didn't go as they thought Mr. Rath would like them to go. And I know there were one or two who didn't turn out at all well and Arthur just dismissed them. They just couldn't seem to get down to earth. They felt they were the leaders--they were the boss--instead of mixing in with the boys as they should.

And we had also, of course, the cooks. And this cook that I had thought that it would be a good idea to have a night school for Japanese. They did have them in some other parts of town. The Japanese would conduct them. So Arthur said, "All right, you start getting some [Japanese students] and we'll have one." We had a very successful Japanese night school that would meet and they met at our home first. We gave up our lanai with the dining room, and then we had two rooms which we gave up to them. But then when the children came it would be too noisy for them at night. They'd [the students] come after dinner, you know. So then they were held in the chapel and they were very successful and we had very fine leaders--Japanese leaders who could speak English--and haole teachers. And it was very pleasant. The boys seemed to think they learn-

ed a good deal. Some of the wives or older women came to the classes, too, to learn. But when they moved from our house over to the chapel, then the women didn't come but they did when they were at the house. There were very few Chinese that came--the Chinese and Japanese didn't mingle, you know--and Mr. Rath felt he couldn't have a separate class for just the Chinese because you had to pay the teachers, of course. I think they paid a dollar a month. (laughter)

There was one woman, a very nice friend, she was going to. . . . Well, some of them were very ambitious--they wanted to learn typing and stenography--so she came down. She also helped in the Sunday School and with singing. But when it came to the stenography, they couldn't get the English, you see, but they could get the typing so they came for that. They enjoyed that very much indeed.

Well, it was an all-day job. Also, before we came there was the army up above, you know--Fort Shafter--and there had been some trouble there with the, uh, coming down into Palama. So Arthur, having been in the army, knew how to deal with such things and so he went up to the powers-that-be and had Palama out of the district [or declared off-limits to military men]. They could go through --pass through--but they couldn't walk or go into that district. So we had no trouble and after awhile, no trouble anyway so we didn't bother. (long pause)

M: When did your children start coming along?

R: Let me see, my first came in 1906. We came in 1905 and then in 1906. . . . And I kept on, you see. I had a cook and then I had a maid, but the maid was a problem because she didn't understand English. And I know once I would, uh--in the morning I'd be over at the house. Then in the afternoon I'd go over about half past one or quarter of two and the child would be asleep then. She was supposed to feed the child, of course, and I showed--she couldn't speak English very well--and I showed her the icebox and the bottle and she'd seen how I'd done it. I came home once about four o'clock and the child was screaming and wondering what the matter was. And then I thought--I went to the icebox and there was the milk. So I had quite a time with my maids and my children. (chuckling)

Then we had later on a woman come--one of the girls come to help with the girls and their sports and fun. But as far as sewing, they didn't know anything about that, you see, so I kept on with that. And I kept on with the mothers' meetings, so I was still pretty busy. And then finally I decided it was just too much. I used to have choir rehearsal too. Oh I had so many things. (laughter)

M: Trying to raise a family at the same time--it's sort of like being a minister's wife.

R: Oh it was worse! Because they don't call ministers up at night to go down to the police station to get boys out. (chuckles) I remember once--this was a lovely girl; she had taught in the Priory--and she came to the settlement and the girls loved her. And they had been. . . . A Mrs. George Castle down at Waikiki let her use her swimming tank--her swimming pool. Now of course we had a tank, but it was wonderful for the girls to go down and swim in the ocean. So once they went down--oh, I don't know how they happened to go down in the evening, but she had permission from Mr. Castle. He loaned them the truck. Yes, it was a covered truck and they took the girls down. And on the way home along Kalakaua [Avenue], the girls were singing. I don't know if you ever heard the song "Let Go Your Blows"? Well, that was a very popular song at that time and they were singing it. Pretty soon a policeman came up and told the driver to stop and he said, "You're making too much noise." The girls' singing! Then he came around in back and looked in--it was a covered wagon--and he said, "Who's the leader here?" And so Miss Cunningham came out and he said, "Well, who are you?" "I'm in charge of the women," she said. He said, "You?" (laughter) She looked to be about sixteen. But what she was worried about was that they might complain to Mr. Castle about the noise and they'd never be allowed the trip again, but they were. (chuckling) So we had some very interesting times. It helped with the kind of dull times too.

Arthur, too, tried to get the boys work when they were ready for it. And some of them have done wonderfully well. It's over forty years since I've been there, you see--since I lived there--so times have changed so much. And now I believe they're joining in with Kalihi. Well, everything has changed. But we had a very fine gymnasium and the business offices in town would use it. Davies men [employees of Theo. H. Davies and Company, Ltd.] would come and, oh, it wasn't called American Factors then . . .

M: Hackfeld? [American Factors, Ltd. or Amfac was formerly H. Hackfeld and Company, Ltd.]

R: No, I don't think they used it but what was the name of the one on King and Fort streets? [B. F. Ehlers and Company, Ltd., now The Liberty House] Yes, the First National Bank--the different banks--the men would come and play; have contests. So they could come when the boys didn't use it. We didn't have the boys at night too much because they would have the afternoons. After school they'd come, you see.

We had a nice football ground--baseball ground--because Mr. Rath was very particular that it was smooth and even and well-kept. And the different schools--Kauluwela School and Kaiulani and another school up there--would come down and play; use the grounds. So that was well-used. But not long after he had gone, somebody came along who was one of the workers and he had some of the football ground taken away for a tennis court. Well, those youngsters didn't have money for tennis balls and tennis [rackets] so that. . . .

Our dental clinic was there and medical clinic was there. We had these besides the doctors who would offer their services in the afternoons. We had a regular medical clinic that started at eight o'clock in the morning and the patients from different places would come there. He was a paid surgeon. Then we had different clinics. The new building was the medical clinic and the administration building and then the gymnasium and our home was right across the field up above. We lived there and the boys' director and the girls' director and the nurses lived up there, so we were all ready for service when it was needed.

M: When were the new buildings that are there now built?

R: Arthur began to raise the money in 1924 and in 1925 the people began moving in. It was an old taro patch that the Methodist Church owned and some of it was a vegetable garden for the Chinese. We had got to the place where we needed a larger building. We lived then on Robello Lane and some of the rooms there we used for the clubs.

END OF SIDE 2/1ST TAPE

END OF FIRST INTERVIEW

August 23, 1971

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

M: There were some things I'd like you to tell me more about; for instance, the health problems you had to cope with. (there is piano music in the background)

R: Well, that's why we started the dispensary and also the different doctors in the town came one afternoon a week in their specialty to help the people. The nurses visited the schools in the morning. We had one nurse for each district, you see. And then if the children had problems they'd be brought to the dispensary.

It was also for the parents. They would come at two

o'clock in the afternoon and the doctors would be there, such as Dr. Cooper from Aiea for the skin diseases; Dr. Pinkerton for the eyes; and the other specialists came down to help. So that is how we had the dispensary at Palama and then in eaoh of the schools there was the dispensary.

There was a Dr. Jackson who was interested in the children and the families and he felt the mothers, many of them, needed a real vacation--a rest--so that is when we started the Fresh-Air Camp. And they went out in the country. We started that in 1915. Wait a minute. I guess it was 1914. Yes, it was in 1914, I think, on the other side of the island at Kaipapau. In 1915 they had tents there and then during the winter Mr. Rath went around the island to see where there'd be a suitable place. And he found it right next to the golf links at Waialua, the Bishop Estate. So he started in.

He, uh, through the help of Waialua Plantation, had twelve cottages built--nine small ones and three larger ones. The small ones had two beds but the large ones had three. And then we had a nurse's cottage where the nurses stayed and also the girls' director. And the dispensary was in a large building that was also the dining room. We had a special dispensary. When necessary doctors would come down and help; also the doctors at Waialua. That's where the Fresh-Air Camp started.

There would be about seventy at a time. First, it was the mothers and the children in 1914 at Kaipapau with the help of some of the people at the Mid-Pacific Institute. They helped with the cooking and the mothers. Then at Waialua we had a cook. And the mothers, they left everything for the children to do so we thought the children needed them [the camps] as much. I think we had the mothers only two years and then decided that. . . . Also, they were from different parts of the town and they weren't always as friendly, one with another. We didn't have the mothers after that; we just had the children. About seventy children, two weeks at a time all through the summer. They came down as soon as school closed and then it ended just before Labor Day.

That's where the health problem came in. We had the day camp down at Palama on Pua Lane. That was for those who were a little suspicious of tuberculosis. We had it for the children and there were some older children who came but they'd be in the daytime and we had a very fine nurse, Miss Huber. But then they realized it wasn't so satisfactory. It was difficult to raise money for it too. They would have all the wonderful attention at the day camp--it was called the Pa Ola Day Camp--but then they'd go home at night to crowded conditions, so we decided that it wasn't satisfactory. And then at the time (siren sound)

Leahi [Hospital] began having a place for the children so it wasn't nearly so necessary, you see.

M: These were children that were suspected of either having it [TB] or of having been exposed at least?

R: No, they were suspected. We didn't have enough room for those who were exposed. No, it was those who were suspicious.

The children were examined before they came down [to camp] so that they wouldn't come with any infectious disease. I know one mother came down with her child and I've forgotten what it was but it would spread through the camp so we had to send her home. It was too bad because she needed it but still it exposed all the children. We kept it just as sanitary in every way as we possibly could. But they were examined before they came.

M: What was the name again of the day camp? And where was it held?

R: Pa Ola. That was on Banyan Street. No, Pua Lane.

M: Were the children charged for the camps?

R: I don't think anybody paid anything. If they did--if they received any attention in the dispensary or anywhere--they could pay ten cents. At Pa Ola Day Camp, no; and in the dispensary rarely anything, no. And at Waialua Fresh-Air Camp there was only one person--one mother--at our first camp over at Kaipapau where we were. We lived in the tents. She felt she wanted to come down and she was able to pay and it was a wonderful experience because she was such a broad-minded woman. It helped so much.

You see, they'd never left their home before. Some of them, when they got on the train--they had to come by train to the place there and also to Waialua--why, they thought they'd never see Honolulu again. (chuckles) Going to the end of the world. And then, you know, some things would come up and they weren't happy but she kind of boosted the morale very much indeed. She was a wonderful woman. Then they spread the word, of course, how good it was--the good food and everything--so we didn't have such a problem filling up the camps the rest of the time. They really enjoyed it.

M: How long did you have the camps then? At Waialua?

R: I know Mr. Rath passed away in 1929 and we had it then, but the next person [the settlement director] who came along wasn't so interested. I don't remember [when they

stopped]. But I know when we had it in 1929, it was very flourishing; very happy. The second year after that, the one in charge wasn't at all enthusiastic about it. He didn't seem to want to keep it up. And yet he was supposed to be very much interested in medicine.

M: Sounds like a marvelous thing to do.

R: Mr. Rath got the idea from Life's fresh air camp. You wouldn't remember it but years ago Life magazine was very, very different from what it is now in its format and they would have a camp every summer for needy children, so when Dr. Jackson spoke of a retreat or someplace where the children and parents could go, he immediately remembered about that.

The way we first started out there was that Mr. Rath hadn't been very well and he was advised to take a rest so we went over to Kaikapau and stayed. I don't know, it was one week or two weeks and it was very nice and close to the water; good swimming. So when Dr. Jackson spoke of that--of having some place for a vacation for the children; for the mothers--he thought of that place. And it was through Mr. W. R. Castle, who let us use the land, that we had the tents and tested it for the mothers to come down. That's on the other side of the island, you know.

M: Yeh. Could you spell that for me?

R: Yes. K-A-I-P-A-PAU. It's all one word. And so I don't remember when it was closed because I didn't have any association with it, you see.

M: Did you regularly go down then each summer? Your whole family went?

R: Oh yes. Yes. Well, I had charge of it; not the first year, because I didn't go down there until late in July. The camp started there with somebody else and then I took charge. One of the nurses had charge. But about the end of July I went down. I had charge of the cooking and planning the program. I'd done that before they went down. So I had that until 1929.

M: What sort of programs did you lay out for them?

R: Well, in the morning they would have their breakfast, then the children had a free time; then they went swimming; then they had a rest at ten o'clock. They lay down on the grass. They brought their mats and would lie on the grass. After their rest they had a little swim and then lunch. Then after lunch they had a real nap. They had to rest

until--I think it was about two o'clock. Then they would have another little swim or wading. Playing.

Oh, I must say that they had crackers and milk--the Saloon Pilots--about ten o'clock. That is, after their swim they had that. Then in the afternoon after their swim they had another Saloon Pilot cracker and milk. And then they had their supper. It was before six o'clock. The mothers would help do the dishes but they would have the girls do most of it, clearing the tables and so forth. Then afterwards we--of course we had a cook and we had some of the older girls set the table and so on. At that time they didn't eat at tables, they sat on the floor, so they really learned a little bit about housekeeping and so on there. And with the living outside there, I remember one girl who, in the afternoon, was walking up and down and she asked me if heaven was like that--(laughter) calm and peaceful and happy. So we had all nationalities. They all mixed in beautifully.

M: Were most of the people, though, from the Palama area?

R: Oh yes, they came from Kakaako, a few from Waikiki, Punchbowl, Kalihi, Palama and--oh dear, what is the place next to Palama?

M: Iwilei?

R: Oh yes, we had some from Iwilei, Kalihi, Palama. Well, it's really where the Kauluwela School is [Aala]. Well, that was really around in Punchbowl [Kauluwela School was formerly on School Street, near Liliha Street]. And I said Kakaako. Oh, and there were a few from Kaimuki, not too many. It wasn't too much settled over there then. So you see they covered all the ground. And sometimes some of the plantations asked if one or two of their families could go there, or their children, because they felt they needed it but they didn't have the facilities for it even though it was out in the country. So it was very well patronized as far as filling it up was concerned.

And then we tried, toward the last, where we had all girls. Oh, the age. I think there wasn't any limit to the age except with the mothers. They could bring the babies but some of the girls brought their younger sisters or brothers, five and six years old. The age limit for boys was twelve and for girls, I think the same, because after that they were a little bit--oh, different problems would come up. They weren't so ready to settle down to a quiet life. And that was the ages. When people knew of children, they would let us know.

M: You didn't have just Hawaiians?

R: Oh now, we had--oh dear, what did we have? We had Hawaiians, Portuguese, uh, I think Koreans. I don't think there were--we had a few what you might call Americans or haoles. At that time there weren't Samoans, so many of those. Did I say Japanese and Koreans?

M: Yes.

R: I remember with the Koreans we had a. . . . The cottages that were built had two cots in them and we had the open windows, you know, not of glass. We had screens and then shades in case it rained. Well, the people, the first we had, would shut them down, you know, so there was no air. So the first thing he [Arthur] did was to just brace them up so they had to stay up. (laughter) They were a little bit scared at first but they found out it was perfectly safe there. So we had all kinds of problems like that to take care of.

The food, they accepted that very well. I remember one of the workers we had. People were having their lunch and she came down and she said, "Oh, Mrs. Rath, the people are so mad. You've given them some beet greens and they said, "That's pig's food!" So I went right up there (laughter) and I tried to talk to them about different kinds of food and what vegetables were good, and why beet greens were good and how we'd gone to the other side of the island to get the beets and the beet greens and how we ate them and we liked them. Well, that solved that problem but they were so unused to things like that, you see, and so we kind of had to teach them.

I remember one mother was so glad to know about the different kinds of food and one time I met her long afterwards and she said [that] at the meals she had put on two kinds of food. I don't remember if it was meat. I don't think it was that, but they had meat and something else to eat and, oh, her husband scolded her for spending so much money on food. She tried to explain to him that that was good and so on. So they learned and one of them told me afterwards how she knew more now what to give the children and what we eat, especially in the morning. Most of them were Chinese, you know, who mostly had rice and tea and the Japanese had the rice.

We didn't have too many of the Orientals. We did have--I remember the Koreans and, of course, we didn't allow smoking in the cottages. There was one family--one mother--who didn't seem to want to follow the rule and we told her that she just couldn't smoke in the cottage; she could outside. Well, the train went at six o'clock in the morning for Honolulu and she took it. She was going to smoke! So a few just didn't seem to appreciate; and others were scared for awhile about having it so open, but with

the screen they realized it was safe.

We would get our food--have it sent down from Honolulu by train; and we had two boys--Punahou boys or from other schools--who took care of the yard and the different houses and the bathhouses and so on, so everything was kept very sanitary for the mothers. They would come at twelve o'clock noon on a Monday and [we'd] have the meal all ready and I almost always had salmon because they all liked salmon. Coming to a strange place you had to give them something you were sure they would like. And then they went back in the second week on a Sunday afternoon on the three o'clock train. So they had their lunch at noon, you see. Some of them were rather sorry to go back but it couldn't last forever. And the mothers, of course, felt they'd had a good vacation so it was very happy.

It's too bad that they gave it up because it really helped the children so much. The nurses realized, too, of course. [With] each group, they would come. Now we'd have a group from Kalihi and that nurse would come down and stay there those two weeks. Then if we had one from Kauluwela--that was where many of the Portuguese [came from]--that nurse would come down. So you see they knew and they worked and as soon as they had--let me see, it would be, well, after their lunch [the first day] we would weigh them. And right after their lunch they'd go to their mat and lie down. That's when they arrived. And then when they went home, after their last meal, we would weigh them. Well, those who had gained of course were praised because they had followed the rules and done everything. So we had to stand guard over the water faucet right near the door because they thought if they drank a lot of water they'd gain more when they were weighed, so they were clever. (laughter) We had to watch out for all kinds of things.

I remember one summer there was one girl who didn't gain a bit. She was so unhappy. She just didn't like anything and yet she didn't want to be sent home. And there were others who gained beautifully. And there was one Chinese boy who had some deformity. He hadn't been able to get about so much but he and his people were willing to have him stay longer, so he was there for four weeks and it helped him wonderfully. He was kind of a cripple and he was so happy about it and he really did very well.

M: It sounds like a very happy time.

R: It was. Mr. Rath had driven around to [look] for a place and he saw this. It was right next to the Waialua railroad station and also the golf links--the Waialua golf links--where the Fort Shafter men used to come down and

play sometimes. Of course the Waialua people did. It was a large, open place. He thought, well now, this is just the place. I've forgotten what they had used it for because there was the Waialua Plantation. Anyway, they cleaned it up and helped. And when Mr. Rath brought down some of the trustees to see it, with the tall grass and everything all overgrown, they thought he was crazy to think about such a thing. (Lynda chuckles) But by the next month, he'd had it fixed up pretty well. They came down, rather curious, and realized it was a very nice place and it was. We had a large place for them, room to move around and play and so on. And going in the water, they loved that.

M: What was the financial arrangement for this? Did the money all come from. . . ?

R: Mr. Rath raised the money. He raised it and they didn't have any Aloha Fund then. So he raised the money for all that was needed.

M: For the settlement and all these projects?

R: Yes, and for the Fresh-Air Camp. Those who could pay--and I don't remember as there were many that did--one or two, you know, felt proud enough to want to pay. I don't remember--it was just a nominal sum. I don't remember whether it was as much as four dollars for the two weeks or whether it wasn't as much but it was a very small sum.

And they would come with the children and many of the fathers came down for the first Sunday to see how it was and their wives--see if they were improving and so on. One nationality was very fussy but they couldn't help but be pleased with the result. It helped very much indeed and the children loved it of course and wanted to come another year. Some of them, the nurses found out, didn't eat much along in May and June because they thought if they didn't weigh very much they'd have a chance to go to the Fresh-Air Camp. (laughter) So they kind of had to pick and choose when the next year came.

M: How were the children chosen to go?

R: Really as to their regular health, not just at the time but how they had been through the years, and some of them thatthey felt needed to get away from the families for awhile and then they'd have a chance to pick up, to really be happy and gain more. And when they came back looking so well, I think it had an effect upon the parents too. But they were mostly chosen from those who didn't seem to be able to gain no matter what the nurses did for them.

M: These were the school nurses?

R: Yes. Well, not the school nurses. They were Palama nurses who worked at the school, yes. They were the ones who really worked. And then not only the school children, but they'd find out in the neighborhood some child [who should go to camp]. And when they chose the mother, they chose a mother who was really quite worn out and then when she came down with the children, the discipline was really nothing because, you see, they had somebody to play with and we had a pavilion where they could lie down in the afternoon if they wanted or play games in there, besides outside. So it helped physically and mentally, you see, all around. Which was what some mothers needed very much.

M: Could you tell me something about the living conditions that these people came from?

R: At that time? Well, really, they weren't too bad because the nurses would kind of encourage them to have things clean, you know. The houses, the streets and the outside weren't so good but they weren't so bad with the nurses' help. Of course there were some cases where the mothers were very negligent, you see, but as a rule . . .

END OF SIDE 1/2ND TAPE

So the conditions weren't so bad. It was really very rare --well, I won't say very rare; it was rather unusual when I found a place not clean, because they were a little ashamed to have someone come around. The children were kept clean. Now when they were down at the camp they had to do the laundry too. So they would keep the children clean. They learned more about cleanliness, really, when they were there too.

The housing conditions when we first came, they--many of them--did their cooking outside in a tin can or something. They didn't have much of a stove and they didn't do so much cooking because they ate much of the--the fish would be raw and the Japanese would have cooked their rice, of course--and many of the people did--and they had their poi. We would have that stuff for them down there.

So one of the first things Mr. Rath did when he got there and saw the conditions was to clean up the streets and the sidewalks because they were in quite bad condition then. And all around there, of course, that raised quite a furor. They thought, "What's this man doing?" But coming from India he knew the dangers and so on. And so the streets were kept clean, then the people kept their yards clean and so, as far as the sanitary problem was concerned, there wasn't too much of it there, you see. And it helped

so much with people visiting them--going around in the district and visiting. They had a little pride as to what should be done. Some you couldn't appeal to very much but there weren't too many. They liked the settlement for their children and they realized that the nurse was a great help.

Still, I know there was a case of one woman who needed--through one of the neighbors we found out she wasn't very well and the nurse went in to see her. The second time she came the woman didn't dare let her in. She said her husband says he doesn't want charity. Well, he could have paid, you know, but that didn't occur to him. (chuckles) So she wasn't allowed to have the nurse. The nurse couldn't go in and afterwards he moved away because he was afraid that he might get into difficulties, having his wife so ill and nothing being done for her. It was rather unfortunate but there weren't many cases like that.

M: What did women do for childbirth? Did they go to the hospital?

R: They had midwives who came around. That was what most of them did. And as far as the nurses were concerned, of course, they suggested hospital but they couldn't tell the people. They let them have their freedom. They let them choose that, you see. If they asked for advice and so on it would be different but most of them had midwives. They felt they couldn't afford a nurse or a doctor.

M: What sort of people were the midwives?

R: Well, as far as I knew and I saw them, they were very, very good women. Of course they were mostly Orientals, some of the lower type. I don't know as there were any haoles that came around. But they did the best to their advantage--the advantage of what they knew--and the people had confidence in them. Of course the nurses, as time went on and the people had more confidence, they would get them into the hospitals. But at first you had to go very slowly against all their habits and traditions. But that's what they had.

M: Did any of the Hawaiians still practice any of their old beliefs or customs, so far as things like childbirth; certain things that you do or. . . ?

R: Oh yes. I imagine they did. We didn't delve into--go into their private things like that. If they wanted to tell us, sometimes they'd tell us what they used to do or what they did. That was the only way but we couldn't put our finger on any who did it, you see, because they had--

there in that section they were really very fine. I mean, they were very congenial with me. Now down at Kakaako they felt a little bit different toward the haoles. They didn't feel quite as free with them.

But you see, besides having the dispensary, we had a large playground for them and a large field for all kinds of ball games; we had a swimming pool for them and we had a gymnasium. We had all those facilities that the children like. And we had different boys' clubs from the very small ones to the seniors. Mr. Rath would meet with the seniors--oh, they were nineteen and twenty and so on up; there were sixteen high school boys or older--every Sunday. And he would talk with them about comments of the day and then they'd have their different games. And the girls would meet. They'd have sewing and they'd have the different physical games and so on. So that had a good effect upon them, you see, and the parents appreciated it because the children had something to do and weren't getting into mischief.

I wasn't at all afraid there. I went out to some meetings down in the center and I'd come back at eleven o'clock at night on the bus and I had quite a distance to walk from the busline up to where I lived but it didn't occur to me to be afraid.

I remember once I was walking home--it was about half-past ten or eleven and I hadn't quite come to the settlement--and about three men came along and one of them said, "Hello, Mama"--that's how they addressed you, you know--and another one yelled at him, "You shut up!" I was the only haole around there, you see. So we had no trouble like that around. No, I don't know of any.

M: Was there a delinquency problem with the adolescents?

R: Not the way it is now. They were too busy. Sometimes, on Saturdays, I really wondered if they went home for lunch. When we had our big settlement which started in 1925, they were there all the time, in the gymnasium or the swimming tank or the boys' field. I mean in the ball game field. Then we had rooms where they could play games or work out things. There was something for them all the time, you see. So we didn't have that. It would be <u>rare</u> if they complained about boys.

Sometimes the parents would come to Mr. Rath and ask if he would help them with a boy. So Arthur would kind of have the boy on probation, told him to be sure and come and see him every day and then he'd talk with him about not being truant. Of course, some of the parents were very ignorant and couldn't cope with the questions of the day so they would ask Mr. Rath to talk with the boys and so on. One of them even wanted the boy to do some wrong so he'd

be under Mr. Rath's eye all the time. (laughter) He asked Mr. Rath what the boy could do. Of course Arthur said, "Nothing, just have him come to me." So we had all kinds.

Every Sunday, as I told you, he met with these older boys and they talked over the different problems. Some of them have done so well here. So that was our life, living right with them. And of course, another thing that was very interesting, so many people from Manoa and Nuuanu didn't like to come--well, they rarely came on the streetcars because they didn't think it was safe and things were unsanitary and so on. But it would be hard for them to find a place that it wasn't all right to be, you see, because the people were really interested in their places, to keep them clean.

M: You mentioned that you had run into some kind of discrimination or at least people looking down on the whole settlement.

R: Well, we noticed at the Fresh-Air Camp that the certain type of people that came from Punchbowl, although they were the same nationality, looked down on the people who came from Kakaako. Do you know where Kakaako is?

M: Um hm.

R: And so we had to try to smooth that over. Well, there was nothing flagrant, nothing about it except we noticed they kind of cliqued. So we were careful about that. It so happened that as a rule they came from one district--from the nearest--but there weren't enough from one district so they would come from another district. But that was the only time, because they seemed to realize--they were really very friendly after a few days. It took them a little time to learn to know one another but they realized they all had the same problems and the same kind of life and it was kind of, well, a community. They realized that the problem of one woman wasn't too different from the problem of the other. But they were all learning. So it was really a very interesting life for them.

Then having the nurse there all the time, they could ask her all kinds of questions. And we had, as I said, two boys. Then we always had a girls' director who took care of the games that they would play and planned little walks for them, but not too much because we felt the children needed the rest and what with the swimming, that was really quite active. We had swings for them. And I remember one group came--I think they came from down at Kakaako--and they were up there (pointing) and our house down here and it was moonlight. I heard a lot of noise and I looked at the clock. It was two o'clock. Here were

the children out on the swings and the teeters having a wonderful time. I said, "Why children, it's nighttime." (laughter) Oh, they scampered to their rooms. Shows that they felt free and happy. And they would ask if they could come again.

M: Did your own children go down with you?

R: Oh yes. We lived right at Palama there. Yes, they were down there too.

M: You didn't give me your children's names last time. Could--Would you do so?

R: (chuckles) The oldest one was James; next was Elizabeth; next was Henry; next was Margaret; and next was Robert. Robert was born in 1915 so that's why I didn't go down [to camp] until later in the summer.

M: I see. How old was your oldest in 1915?

R: He was born 1906. That must have been nine years old, mustn't it?

M: So you had your hands full in addition to running the camp.

R: I certainly did. (laughter) Yes. They all fitted in and they all mingled in and always were friendly. The children never thought anything but what my children were just one of them, you know. That's the way it was all the time --join all games--until I moved away from there. I moved in 1929, then we came away. And we had known many of those children, of course, in the Palama section because they used to go to the Sunday School there. And they knew, too, what Palama was so that helped too when some other groups would come down.

There was one mother came down with the child--I can't think what the disease was--it was something that was very catching; some children's disease--and we just didn't dare let her stay with the children. We had to send her back but we told her she could come another year. How she escaped the nurse, because the nurse examined them, but you see she would be. . . . I think they weren't at the dispensary some Saturdays and they saw them Friday or maybe they hadn't seen her during the week, so the child could easily get it. Then the doctor would come down and see how things were and if we did have any trouble we could call the doctor at Waialua. They were so willing to help.

We had our milk from the boys'--they called it the Boys' Industrial School, the boys' reform school over on the other side of the island, not where they are now.

They were--oh, which name? Kahuku. They were at Kahuku. And we had. . . . (long pause) No, the milk didn't come from there. Our milk came from the Kamehameha Schools because they were closed during the summer, you see, so the milk would come down in cans every day. And we would get Love's bread every day from up there.

But at Kahuku we would go around on the farms there. We'd get fresh vegetables, so it was nice having them so handy. The bread and the meat would come down from the--we would get that from the Metropolitan [Market]. They'd send it down every day or every other day as we needed it. So that's where we got our supplies. The fresh vegetables, we'd go scouting around. And fruit! I know the Dillinghams at Mokuleia gave us some nice papaya and we would get pineapple from the other side of the island, so they always had fresh fruit of some kind.

M: One thing we didn't talk about at all was a little bit about your background; for instance, your parents' names and . . .

R: Oh, my parents came from Norway and my father's name was Martinus Olesen and the last name--he took the name from a rock that was on the island there because just having the name Olesen, there were too many who had the same name, so to stop confusion, why, he took the name Helsjier. It was spelled, if you write it down, H-E-L-S-J-I-E-R. But when my first sister went to school, that was too much of a spelling for the teacher so they changed it to H-E-L-S-H-E-R. And my mother came from Norway also. They came in 1872.

M: Were they married when they came?

R: No, they were married after they came here. I think my mother came--yes, she came the same time, in 1872.

M: They settled where?

R: Yes, they went to Concord, Massachusetts.

M: I remember your telling me about Concord. That's where you were born?

R: Yes, all of us were born there except my second sister. My mother had taken a trip to Europe and while there my second sister was born in Norway, but all the rest of us were born in Massachusetts.

M: What did your father do for a living?

R: Oh, he was a farmer. He was the--oh, what do they call it? Here they called him the supervisor. What name did they call it? You wouldn't call it the manager of the farms because the ones who owned it were. He was the. . .

M: Overseer or something?

R: Yes, overseer of the farms there. A very large farm in Concord. That's where we lived and then, when the man who owned it retired and went to California, my father bought a farm in the northwestern part of the town and that's where we lived. But he was the overseer of two large farms, first one and then this farm.

M: What have you done then since your husband died in 1929 and you left Palama?

R: Well, then I moved with the children and that's all. I just took care of them. They went to school and then they went on their--took up their different occupations.

M: Where was your home after you left Palama?

R: Oh, well I was in different parts of the town. The last time I was over on Wilder Avenue here. (microphone noises) But my family--three of them were married 1937-38, I think it was, and they are now on the mainland. I have only one son here and one daughter. (long pause)

M: Was your husband paid well at Palama, as professionals go?

R: No! He waited fourteen years for one raise. (Lynda chuckles) No.

M: How would his salary have compared to what teachers were getting then or doctors or college professors or whatever?

R: Well, it wasn't very much. He raised the salaries of the workers there because he felt they needed it, but somehow his wasn't and we just lived accordingly.

M: Well, that's usually the way in that kind of work.

R: Absolutely.

M: What they give you is absolutely little as they can get away with giving you. (laughter) Just enough . . .

R: You could live on the faith. (laughter) Well, you see too, having a large salary and doing that work, you can't do it. They would say, "Oh yes, she can talk but see how

much she gets," and so on. So you can't expect a high salary and yet again--well, they do things differently now. I think they lose out a great deal in not visiting the districts but they don't do that now. They don't visit the homes. It's entirely different. They don't have the personal touch that means a lot to people who are having a struggle and who have problems. You don't know very much yourself but at any rate you sometimes have sympathy. That helps.

I hope I'll hear this. I don't know, I've been talking on.

M: You've just given me a lot of marvelous material.

R: Have I?

M: Yes. Really.

COUNTER AT 375, SIDE 2/2ND TAPE

END OF INTERVIEW

Audited and edited by Katherine B. Allen, 1979

Subject Index

THE WATUMULL FOUNDATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In May 1971, the Watumull Foundation initiated an Oral History Project.

The project was formally begun on June 24, 1971 when Katherine B. Allen was selected to interview kamaainas and longtime residents of Hawaii in order to preserve their experiences and knowledge. In July, Lynda Mair joined the staff as an interviewer.

During the next seventeen months, eighty-eight persons were interviewed. Most of these taped oral histories were transcribed by November 30, 1972.

Then the project was suspended indefinitely due to the retirement of the foundation's chairman, Ellen Jensen Watumull.

In February 1979, the project was reactivated and Miss Allen was recalled as director and editor.

Three sets of the final transcripts, typed on acid-free Permalife Bond paper, have been deposited respectively in the Archives of Hawaii, the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawaii, and the Cooke Library at Punahou School.